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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [KZ](#) [GG](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: TFGG01: KAZAKHSTAN CAUTIOUS ON GEORGIA-RUSSIA
CONFLICT, BUT MAKING HELPFUL REMARKS

Classified By: Pol-Econ Chief Steven Fagin, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

11. (C) Kazakhstan will likely continue its cautious approach toward the Georgian-Russian conflict to preserve its equities with both countries. Nevertheless, the Kazakhstanis appear genuinely concerned about the long-term implications of Russia's actions for other CIS states. While Kazakhstan is walking a fine line in its public message, in President Nazarbayev's most recent remarks, he stressed the importance of the principle of territorial integrity, and an MFA statement called for full implementation of the agreements brokered by Sarkozy and for more OSCE observers in the conflict zone. Kazakhstani media commentary was very limited during the first days of the conflict, but has increased in recent days. The Kazakhstanis delivered initial aid for conflict victims through Vladikavkaz, but have reassured us that they will ultimately use multiple routes to assist both sides. End Summary.

CAUTIOUS APPROACH...

12. (C) Kazakhstan will likely continue to maintain a cautious approach toward the Georgia-Russia conflict. On the one hand, the Kazakhstanis will not jeopardize their strategic relationship with Russia by directly lining up against the Russians on this issue. On the other hand, the Kazakhstanis have important equities in Georgia too. Kazakhstan is reportedly the largest foreign investor in Georgia, owning 100 percent of the Batumi oil terminal and holding major stakes in Georgia's hotel and resort sector as well as in Tbilisi's gas distribution company. Georgia is also expected to become an increasingly important transit country for Kazakhstani crude; it is, in fact, a lynchpin in Kazakhstan's efforts to diversify crude transport routes. (Note: One key theme in the Kazakhstani media coverage of the conflict has been concern about these investments and about crude transit. The Kazakhstani MFA has sounded reassuring notes on the investments, contending that their safety is guaranteed by bilateral Kazakhstan-Georgia agreements. The government has also explained that crude that would have transited Georgia is for now being redirected for domestic use. End Note.) Of additional importance, President Nazarbayev holds Saakashvili in high personal regard, seeing himself as a mentor to the Georgian leader who is his junior by 28 years.

...BUT CONCERNS ABOUT LONG-TERM IMPLICATIONS

13. (C) MFA Americas Department Director Talgat Kaliyev called us in on August 15 for a lengthy discussion of the conflict. He was very concerned about the consequences of Russia's actions for other CIS states, stressing that this is "the

first time Russia has directly intervened militarily in another CIS state since the fall of the USSR." He noted that the other CIS countries are not standing openly with Russia, and that even Belarusian President Lukashenko has been silent, much to Russia's consternation. The long-run implications of the conflict for Kazakhstan, with its large ethnic Russian population concentrated in the country's north, are worrisome, Kaliyev explained. He discounted the relevance of a purported pro-Russian statement made by the council of the CSTO parliamentary assembly, doubting that any Kazakhstani parliamentarians had a role in putting it together. (Comment: Kaliyev also maintained that the Kazakhstani public is quite sympathetic to the Georgian position. However, we have some doubts about this. With quite limited coverage of the conflict on Kazakhstani television stations, most Kazakhstanis are getting their news about events in Georgia from Russian TV networks, a fact which presumably has a strong influence on their views. End Comment.)

14. (C) In an August 19 meeting with the Deputy Chief of Mission and visiting ARCENT commander Lieutenant General Loveland, Deputy Foreign Minister Sarybay emphasized Kazakhstan's "historical relations" with both the Russians and the Georgians. He stressed Kazakhstan's support for the ceasefire agreement and for the withdrawal of "both military forces," adding further than "no one should provoke any escalation."

PUBLIC STATEMENTS HELPFUL

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15. (C) While the Kazakhstanis have been walking a fine line with their public message, what they have said thus far includes several helpful elements. Nazarbayev initially raised eyebrows on August 8, when during a meeting with Putin on the margins of the Beijing Olympics, he appeared to take Russia's side and was quoted as saying, among other things, that "the Georgian leadership was wrong when it failed to make public the heightened tensions (in South Ossetia)." This statement, however, was made early on, before events were clear -- and before the Russians moved deep into Georgian territory. Nazarbayev's second statement, made while meeting with President Bakiyev in Kyrgyzstan on August 14, was much better. He stressed that the "the principle of territorial integrity is recognized by the entire world community," noting further that "we all have come out against separatism in documents accepted within the framework of the CIS."

16. (U) The MFA did not release an official statement on the conflict until August 19. On the one hand, the statement criticized "the attempt at forcefully resolving a complex ethno-territorial issue," arguing that it "brought about serious consequences" and significantly worsened the conditions for a "peaceful and legal resolution." On the other hand, it called on all parties to "strictly fulfill" the agreements brokered by French President Sarkozy and stressed that Kazakhstan supports increasing the number of OSCE observers in the conflict zone and "activating their role."

PRESS WAITS FOR NAZARBAYEV

17. (SBU) Kazakhstan's state-controlled broadcast media and newspapers, and even most of its privately-owned print outlets, had very limited coverage of and commentary on the conflict in its early days, apparently waiting for Nazarbayev to first set the general line -- which he did in his August 14 remarks. Commentary has accordingly increased in recent days. An August 18 piece in privately-owned, but largely pro-government daily newspaper Littr argued that it would be

risky for Kazakhstan to criticize Georgia's actions in South Ossetia given Kazakhstan's substantial investments in Georgia (which it estimated to be worth \$700 million). An August 19 editorial in independent business weekly Delovaya Nedelya accused Russia of double standards on separatism, pointing to the Chechnya conflict, but nevertheless maintained that Kazakhstan should hold to a neutral position so that it is not dragged into "military adventures" serving someone else's interests. An August 20 Litr article quoted a Kazakhstani think tanker explaining that Russia won in South Ossetia tactically, but lost strategically in raising the concerns of both NATO members and other CIS countries.

AID FOR BOTH SIDES

18. (C) In his August 14 remarks in Kyrgyzstan, Nazarbayev promised Kazakhstani assistance for victims of the conflict. Georgian Ambassador to Kazakhstan Zurab Shurgaia told the Deputy Chief of Mission on August 15 that the assistance would be welcome, and that the Kazakhstanis could even send some directly through Russia, so long as it was delivered south by a neutral party like the Red Cross, and not by the Russian government. The first planeload of Kazakhstani aid actually arrived in Vladikavkaz on August 16 -- where, to Georgian consternation, it was apparently handed over to the Russian authorities. Deputy Foreign Minister Sarybay explained to the Deputy Chief of Mission on August 19 that Kazakhstan's initial shipments were being sent exclusively through Vladikavkaz for purely logistical reasons. He promised that Kazakhstan would ultimately use multiple routes in aiding both sides.

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